

Legislative Testimony of Montana Highway Patrol Capt. Tom Butler regarding a High School in Big Sky, given on January 29, 2007 before the Senate Education Committee.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, good afternoon, my name is Tom Butler and I am a Captain for the Montana Highway Patrol in Belgrade. Part of my district includes Big Sky, the Gallatin Canyon and Hwy. 191. In 2006, we had several fatal crashes on Hwy. 191 ultimately killing 12 people. On the afternoon of January 3, 2006, a head on collision on Hwy. 191 occurred, fatally injuring 3 people. After it occurred, traffic including the afternoon school bus, was backed up on either side of the crash for an extended period of time. After a couple of hours of being stuck in traffic, the school bus driver left his bus leaving the children unsupervised and walked to the scene of the crash and explained to me that several of the children on his bus needed to use the bathroom, but he didn't want them to get out of the bus. Prior to this, none of the emergency responders realized that a school bus was stuck in the line of traffic behind us. At this point of the investigation emergency responders were still trying to remove the fatally injured from the vehicle. At my request they stopped their work, covered the vehicle with a tarp, moved several response vehicles out of the way and allowed the school bus to drive through the scene to get the children home.

The geography of the area is such that there is no alternate route to get to Big Sky in a timely manner. The only way to get to Big Sky from Bozeman besides Hwy 191 is 150-mile trip through Ennis.

On September 7, 2006 at around 7 in the morning, a truck pulling a semi trailer loaded with propane crashed in the Gallatin Canyon tearing open the trailer and losing an entire load of propane. That morning the school bus was unable to make it to Bozeman as the road was blocked for an extended period of time and returned to Big Sky with the children.

Big Sky is a growing community. The average daily traffic counts through the Gallatin Canyon for vehicles have been increasing steadily in the past several years, currently exceeding 8000 cars per day. While neither the agency nor I have any position on the issue of a new high school district or a satellite high school of the Bozeman High School in Big Sky, we are concerned about the safety of the children riding in buses on Hwy. 191.

I'm available for questions should you have any. Thanks for your time.